Education Authority

2026 - 2029



NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN

LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF NEED

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Introduction

The Education Authority (EA) Youth Service Local Assessment of Need is a key document outlined in the Department of Education's (DE) Youth Work Policy *Priorities for Youth (2013)* as it requires the Education Authority to ensure *'Planning, funding and the delivery of youth work will be based on the EA composite (local and regional) assessment of need.'*

The wider requirements and purpose of undertaking the assessment of need process is outlined in detail within the Regional Assessment of Need 2026-2029. This regional document provides further detail on the EA's statutory duty, other policy requirements and links to Northern Ireland Government strategies. It also sets the context within which these documents are being completed as well as the key purpose and functions the effective youth provision provides for children and young people. The regional document can be found here.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Regional Assessment of Need. Its key objective is to establish the level of need for Youth Service provision for children and young people aged 4-25 years in Newry, Mourne and Down. It brings together data, evidence and local insight to help identify the needs and barriers children and young people in Newry, Mourne and Down face. Listening to and understanding, the voices and opinions of children and young people is an important part of this process.

Methodology

Following on from the methodology of the Regional Assessment of Need process, there were six parts to developing the Local Assessment of Need for in Newry, Mourne and Down. The tools used to gather essential information and data for the regional document had the ability to be filtered at a local level and this supplied EA with an excellent resource to listen to and understand the direct voices of children and young people. Details of how this was achieved are laid out in the regional document.

Part One – Children and Young People's Survey

A survey for all children and young people aged 4-25 years was designed and developed by a project team set up within the Education Authority Youth Service based on the eight strategic outcomes of the Children and Young Peoples' Strategy 2020-2030. A total of 5,451 children and young people responded to the survey. From those figures 688 participants completed the survey in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Part Two – Children and Young People's Focus Groups

The Education Authority Youth Service Participation team, working with young people from the Small Grants panel, designed a resource allowing facilitators to manage and record the focus group sessions. Focus groups with children and young people were facilitated by youth workers. These were based on the policy age group bands and including specific groups of young people, within the Section 75 grouping, or those who may be at greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation, or isolation because they experience a combination of barriers to learning. A total of 138 focus groups, involving 1,630 participants, were facilitated throughout Northern Ireland. 16 focus groups, involving 176 participants were completed in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Part Three – The Development of Area Profiles

Area Profiles using all available statistical data and information about the needs of children and young people have been produced using a range of data and information from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. These reports focused on demographic information and reflected wider social, economic and environmental determinants which negatively impacted children and young people.
The Area profile Report for in Newry, Mourne and Down can be found here.

Part Four – Embedding Findings from Key Research

The Education Authority Youth Service's Information and Planning Team conducted a significant literature review under the key outcome areas used in the survey and focus group materials. They also had access to all research and stakeholder engagement event reports conducted by the Youth Service as well as other research completed by academics and youth organisations relevant to the assessment of need.

Part Five – Parents and Organisation Survey

A survey for parents and other relevant organisations was designed and developed by a project team set up within the EA Youth Service based on the eight strategic outcomes of the Children and Young Peoples' Strategy 2020-2030.

Part Six – Wider Stakeholder Engagement

Local Advisory Group meeting – Review of Needs of Children & Young People in Newry, Mourne and Down 13 March 2025.

Local Advisory Group meeting – Review of Needs of Children & Young People in Newry, Mourne and Down 19 March 2025 (Online).

Seven youth engagement events with young people in each DEA February 2025.

Youth Work Staff Engagement Event 18th February 2025.

Local Advisory Group Stakeholders Engagement Event Health & Wellbeing 13th February 2025.

Newry, Mourne & Down Local Advisory Group meeting 9 October 2024.

Newry, Mourne & Down Local Advisory Group meeting 6 November 2024.

Stakeholder Engagement Event on the Cost-of-Living 27 November 2024.

Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership – Newry Locality Planning Group 9 October & 4 December 2024.

Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership – South Armagh Locality Planning Group 12 November & 14 January 2025.

Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Southern Outcomes 12 December 2024.

Council in Numbers

Newry, Mourne and Down Key Facts:

The population of Newry, Mourne and Down local government district is 182,634 people.

61,149 children and young people aged 0-25 years live in Newry, Mourne and Down.

51,920 children and young people aged 4-25 years live in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Age bands population:

- 9,229 aged 0 – 3 years
- 12,830 aged 4 – 8 years
- 13,225 aged 9 – 13 years
- 11,981 aged 14 – 18 years
- 13,884 aged 19 – 25 years

In Newry, Mourne and Down 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in deprivation.

33,143 children and young people (54.2%) live in a rural community in Newry, Mourne and Down.

24% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Newry, Mourne and Down come from a lone parent family (census21).

1,537 Newcomers attend schools in Newry, Mourne and Down (4%) – NI Average 5%.

136 Irish Traveller children and young people.

9,006 (35%) of all pupils in Newry, Mourne and Down are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24 – (NI average 28%).

6,853 pupils (19.8%) who attend school in Newry, Mourne and Down have Special Educational Needs or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (incl. equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and Maths in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 80% compared to the NI average of 76.1%.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 3.9% (NI average 4.7%).

4.4% of young people aged 20-24 are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI Average 4.9%).

The proportion of Primary 1 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 21.3% (NI average 20.4%). This represents 25% of girls (NI 24.3%) and 17% of boys (NI 16.5%).

The proportion of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 27.6% (NI average 26%). This represents 30% of girls (NI 26.2%) and 26% of boys (NI 25.8%).

Suicide rates in Newry, Mourne and Down have decreased from 2017, 23 suicides to 19 in 2023. The suicide rate has dropped this past 3 years from 27 in 2021, to 17 in 2022 and to 19 in 2023.

There were 62 incidents with a sectarian motivation in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24.

There were 64 incidents with a racist motivation in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24. This is a 23% decrease from the previous year of 83 racial motivated incidents.

There has been a 10.8% (1,353) rise in incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24 to year 2022/23 (1,221) in Northern Ireland.

Across Newry, Mourne and Down there were 107 people killed or seriously injured (Police recorded road traffic casualties by injury severity- 2024).

There was a total of 1,721 domestic abuse crimes in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24. This is a 17% decrease from the previous year. The average for domestic abuse crimes in Newry, Mourne and Down DEAs is 246 (NI average 250).

There was a total of 3,960 anti-social behaviour incidents in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24. This is a 2% a decrease from the previous year. The average for anti-social behaviour incidents in Newry, Mourne and Down DEAs is 565 (NI average 567).

Constituency Data

27.2% of children in the Newry and Armagh electoral constituency live in poverty (Newry and Mourne wards of Ballybot, Bessbrook, Camlough, Creggan, Crossmaglen, Daisy Hill, Derrymore, Drumgullion, Drumalane, Fathom, Forkhill, Newtownhamilton, Silver Bridge, St Mary's, St Patrick's, Tullyhappy, and Windsor Hill).

In terms of relative poverty, Newry and Armagh was the highest, with 6,592 children under 16 living in poverty. The second highest figure was 6,023, which was in Belfast West.

Northern Ireland Data: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and Attitudes of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland in 2024 – The Executive Office reports that:

In the last year, almost a fifth of 16-year-olds had experienced online violence (19%).

Psychological violence was experienced by 18% of respondents. Just over one in ten had experienced sexual violence (11%) and 7% had experienced physical violence.

Of those respondents experiencing violent acts or behaviour in the last year, the most common places where they occurred were online (42%), at school (35%) and a public outdoor space (26%).

Key Trends / Highlights:

Economic Disadvantage and Poverty

In Newry, Mourne and Down, 18.1% of children and young people live in deprivation, with a notable 27.2% of children in the Newry and Armagh constituency experiencing poverty. There are also 6,592 children under the age of 16 living within the Armagh and Newry constituency area living in relative poverty. This council area also faces economic challenges, as 35% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals, which is significantly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 28%. Additionally, 24% of children come from lone-parent families, further highlighting the economic vulnerability many families in the area face.

Health and Well-Being

In the Newry, Mourne and Down area the high rates of obesity and overweight among children—21.3% of Primary 1 pupils and 27.6% of Year 8 pupils—exceed the Northern Ireland average, signalling a need for improved health initiatives and nutrition education. Additionally, while suicide rates have decreased, mental health continues to be a major concern, with many young people facing both online and offline abuse. This highlights the urgent need for enhanced emotional health and wellbeing support and resources to address these challenges and promote overall well-being for young people.

Education and Opportunities

In the Newry, Mourne and Down area, 80% of school leavers achieve at least 5 GCSEs, including English and Maths, surpassing the Northern Ireland average. However, 3.9% of school leavers face challenges in transitioning to employment or further education, as they are either unemployed or have an unknown status. Additionally, a significant 19.8% of pupils have Special Educational Needs, highlighting the need for increased support and tailored educational services to ensure all students can succeed and progress into their future careers or further studies.

Community Safety

The community continues to face significant safety concerns, with 62 sectarian and 64 racist incidents reported in 2023/24, reflecting ongoing community tensions that require further efforts to promote understanding and reduce conflict. While incidents of anti-social behaviour showed a slight decrease to 3,960, the need for continued community safety initiatives remains evident. Additionally, violence against women and girls is a serious issue, a recent report highlighted that in Northern Ireland 19% of 16-year-olds reported online violence, 18% experienced psychological violence and 11% faced sexual violence. These figures highlight the urgent need for stronger protective measures and targeted interventions to safeguard young women and promote a safer environment for all.

These trends highlight the significant challenges facing children and young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down, including economic disadvantage, educational barriers, health concerns and ongoing safety issues, particularly related to violence and discrimination.

Findings from Children and Young People:

This section combines the results from the survey conducted with children and young people, feedback from the focus groups and outlining how these are supported by the findings from research.

When asked what the most important theme of provision was for them, the children and young people, through the survey, ranked the themes by importance to them as follows:

1.Economic and Environmental Stability – 36%

2. Emotional Health and Wellbeing – 19%

3. Access to Play and Leisure – 18%

4. Living in Safety and Stability – 12%

5. Good Relations and Equality – 5%

6. Learning and Achieving – 5%

7. Respect for Young People's Rights – 5%

8. Making a Positive Contribution to Society – 0.8%

Economic and Environmental Stability

Key Facts

In Newry, Mourne and Down 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in an area of deprivation.

33,143 children and young people (54.2%) live in a rural community in Newry, Mourne and Down.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 3.9% (NI average 4.7%).

4.4% of young people aged 20-24 are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI Average 4.9%).

9,006 (35%) of all pupils in Newry, Mourne and Down are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

In Newry, Mourne and Down many young people face challenges that impact their future opportunities. Around 18.1% (11,068) of children and young people live in areas with high levels of deprivation, which makes it harder for them to access things like good education, essential services and career opportunities. Additionally, 54.2% (33,143) of young people live in rural areas, where there are fewer resources and opportunities compared to cities or towns.

This is reflected in young people's outlook on the future, with 24% of young people reporting that they do not think there will be any opportunities for them as they move forward and 23% unsure about their ability to secure employment. These statistics point to a lack of access to pathways that could help young people realise their potential, leaving many feeling uncertain and disconnected.

The impact of financial insecurity is stark in the area, as 9,006 (35%) of pupils in Newry, Mourne, and Down are eligible for Free School Meals in the 2023/24 school year, a figure well above the NI average of 28%. This statistic highlights how poverty is limiting young people's ability to take part in enriching activities and access the resources that would support their academic and personal development. 81% of young people report that poverty is impacting their lives, making it difficult to access not only the basics like food and clothing but also essential opportunities for personal growth and education.

While the area shows some positive employment trends, such as the fact that the percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or have an unknown status in 2022/23 is 3.9%, which is better than the NI average of 4.7%, young people still face challenges in securing stable work. Despite a low percentage of young people aged 20-24 who are not in employment or lacking qualifications (4.4%, compared to the NI average of 4.9%), the pathway to meaningful work remains difficult. Many young people express frustration at not having enough support to access these opportunities, with the cost of things like insurance for apprenticeships being a major obstacle. This leaves many young people feeling trapped in a cycle of limited opportunities.

For young people in the area the environment is a growing concern. 56% of young people express worry about climate change and many feel that they are not receiving enough education or opportunities to engage with climate issues, with 30% stating they do not get the chance to learn about the environmental challenges they face. Additionally, a significant 75% believe not enough is being done to tackle the issue. This concern has led many to consider green careers, but a lack of guidance on how to access these fields creates a barrier for those eager to contribute to sustainability and environmental work. A small number of young people stated that they feel disconnected from opportunities that could align with their growing interest in eco-friendly industries.

The uncertainty surrounding the future is also tied to a lack of basic life skills, with many young people feeling unprepared for independent living. As a result, young people often feel anxious and unconfident about living on their own, with many unsure of how to navigate the responsibilities of adulthood. This is especially significant across Newry, Mourne and Down where 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in deprivation, as these skills are critical in helping them become financially independent and self-sufficient.

Young people and stakeholders report that this sense of unpreparedness can hinder their ability to thrive as they face the practical challenges of adulthood. When young people struggle with basic skills,

such as budgeting, cooking or even managing their emotional health, it can affect their overall well-being, career success and social relationships. Furthermore, uncertainty about how to handle these responsibilities can create feelings of isolation and a lack of agency, preventing young people from taking control of their own futures. These life skills are essential for helping young people become more independent and confident as they transition into adulthood.

In addition, the data highlighted that 56% of young people are concerned about climate change because it will impact their future. Young people cited that they face the consequences of things like extreme weather, rising sea levels and food shortages. Since they are still building their lives, they are worried about how these problems will affect their health, future opportunities and the environment they live in.

Young people and stakeholders reported that mentorship and practical advice is needed with many young people feeling that they lack the guidance and real-world knowledge required to make informed decisions about their futures and to gain a better understanding of how to navigate career paths.

In conclusion, young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down face various challenges, including financial struggles, limited education, job opportunities and uncertainty about the future. Despite these difficulties, they are eager to build a better future for themselves and the planet. By offering support in life skills, career preparation and environmental education young people can be supported to overcome these challenges and feel more confident and hopeful.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Key facts

6,853 pupils (19.8%) who attend school in Newry, Mourne and Down 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

Approximately 12,000 children and young people aged 0-25 years have a mental health need.

2,333 children and young people aged 0-24 years have autism.

The proportion of Primary 1 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 21.3% (NI average 20.4%). This represents 25% of girls (NI 24.3%) and 17% of boys (NI 16.5%).

The proportion of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 27.6% (NI average 26%). This represents 30% of girls (NI 26.2%) and 26% of boys (NI 25.8%).

17.5% of children and young people aged 0-24 years have a long-term health condition (NI 19.8%).

There were 4.91 births per 1,000 births to young mothers aged under 20 years (NI average 5.83%).

There were 0.24 births per 1,000 births to young mothers aged under 17 years (NI average 0.75%).

According to the most recent census, 629 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQIA+.

Suicide rates in Newry, Mourne and Down have decreased from 2017, 23 suicides to 19 in 2023. The suicide rate has dropped this past 3 years from 27 in 2021, to 17 in 2022 and to 19 in 2023.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle involves more than just physical fitness; it encompasses mental and emotional well-being as well. For children and young people, good mental health is fundamental to their development and overall happiness. When mental health struggles arise, they can negatively affect various aspects of life, including academic performance, relationships and social interactions. For instance, 36% of young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down report feeling calm and relaxed, but a considerable proportion 28% express concern over the lack of support for emotional well-being, highlighting the ongoing need for accessible services. When mental and emotional health is supported, it fosters better learning outcomes, stronger social connections and an easier transition into adulthood.

In the Newry, Mourne, and Down area, 12,000 young people are affected by mental health needs, and this number reflects the challenges they face daily. There is a growing sense of frustration among young people who feel that medication is often prioritised over meaningful support, such as listening to their concerns. In fact, 28% of young people expressed feeling that there is no accessible place to get support for emotional well-being. Young people stated that they need accessible, meaningful support for their emotional health and well-being and spaces where they can talk openly, feel understood and receive guidance that addresses the emotional and psychological challenges they face. Without access to the right resources or spaces for expression, young people may feel isolated or unheard, which can worsen their mental health struggles.

This comes in the wake of ongoing challenges, including anxiety, stress, bullying (both in person and online) and body image concerns. The situation is further compounded by worrying statistics, in 2023, 19 suicides were recorded in the area, which although lower than previous years, continues to show that mental health is a critical issue.

Physical health is similarly impacted by the pressures young people face. With 21.3% of Primary 1 pupils identified as overweight or obese, higher than the Northern Ireland average of 20.4%, physical health is a growing concern. Among Year 8 pupils, this number rises to 27.6%, reflecting a broader trend of increasing weight issues in the area. This is particularly concerning when considering that 17.5% of young people in the area live with long-term health conditions, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and stress.

The young people report that finding opportunities for physical activity is difficult, especially in rural areas where safety concerns limit outdoor options. Among young women, in particular, the traditional focus on team sports is often not appealing. Young people recognise that physical activity plays a crucial role in both emotional wellbeing and physical health, however, the young people especially in rural areas, face barriers that limit their opportunities to stay active. Safety concerns, such as lack of supervision, or the fear of crime, can make outdoor activities less appealing or even unsafe. This creates a need for more accessible, safe spaces for young people to engage in physical activity.

Substance misuse, including the use of alcohol, drugs and vaping, is another significant concern, with many young people noting how easily accessible these substances are in the area. The negative impact of body image issues, especially the pressures related to over-training and gym culture, was also highlighted. Both boys and girls are affected by these issues, which contribute to poor self-esteem and an unhealthy relationship with their bodies. The pressures of social media exacerbate these feelings, creating a distorted view of reality and fuelling the cycle of stress and anxiety.

For young people in rural areas, where feelings of isolation and loneliness are more common, these issues can feel even more pronounced. It is worth noting that 17.5% of children and young people aged 0-24 years in the area have a long-term health condition, which often leads to increased isolation. With 36% of young people reporting, they feel calm and relaxed, it is clear that some support exists, but the 28% who report a lack of emotional support spaces demonstrates there is a long way to go.

The problem is compounded by issues such as lack of sleep, which impacts young people's ability to concentrate during the day and adds to their emotional and emotional health and wellbeing struggles. Many young people report staying awake until the early hours of the morning, leading to fatigue and difficulty managing the demands of school and social life. This lack of sleep affects both physical and emotional well-being, making it difficult for young people to fully engage in school and extracurricular activities.

Economic and social pressures also play a role in the challenges faced by young people. For those without the financial means to engage in extracurricular activities or access healthy food, there is a sense of frustration. The 22% of young people who reported feeling that there are no opportunities for physical activities highlight how some young people feel overlooked and unsupported. These young people often feel disconnected from the broader community, exacerbating feelings of isolation. This is particularly troubling when considering that 19.8% of pupils in Newry, Mourne, and Down have special educational needs or disabilities, which can make it even harder to access the necessary support or engage in physical activities.

The demands of school life and the pressure to succeed are also significant stressors. The weight of academic pressure, combined with homework and exams, means that young people often struggle to balance their emotional and physical well-being. These pressures, in combination with high expectations placed on them by peers, parents and society contribute to mental health difficulties. Among the 12,000 children and young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down with emotional health needs, there is a significant desire for spaces to openly discuss these issues and seek support. For example, the 22% of young people who stated they do not feel there are enough opportunities for physical activities clearly want to see more inclusive, accessible options that focus on fun rather than competition.

The young people stressed that they need greater support, especially around emotional resilience, coping strategies and building a healthy relationship with their bodies. They want safe spaces where they can discuss issues like body image, emotional health and wellbeing and substance misuse without fear of judgment. Many also want better access to emotional health and wellbeing support for young men.

Access to Play and Leisure

Key facts

97% of teachers agree that outdoor play is critical for a child to reach his/her potential.

88% of teachers agree that children are happier after playing outdoors.

86% of teachers agree that playing outdoors gives children a better understanding of the environment.

There were 22,715 pre-school placements in Northern Ireland in 2022/2023.

36,556 children aged 0-3 were registered with Sure Start projects in 2023-2024.

There are approximately 125 council registered play parks across Newry, Mourne and Down.

There are 6 council-managed leisure and recreational centres in Newry, Mourne and Down.

In the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area, there are approximately 45 Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs. These consist of 36 football clubs, 1 hurling club and 9 dual clubs, offering around 476 teams in total.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has approximately 55 soccer clubs in the area, collectively providing around 215 teams. (*Sports Facility Strategy*)

Newry Mourne and Down has approximately 100 miles of coastline, featuring a variety of beautiful beaches. This includes notable Blue Flag beaches such as Murlough, Cranfield, and Tyrella, which are celebrated for their pristine sands and excellent facilities.

Newry, Mourne and Down is home to the Mourne Mountains, a range of granite peaks known for their rugged terrain and natural beauty. The area is popular for hiking and climbing, with well-marked trails and scenic views.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Play and leisure are essential to the growth and development of children and young people, providing them with valuable opportunities to stay active, build life skills and experience joy. Through engaging in play, children gain a better understanding of the world around them, stimulates their creativity and improves their emotional and social well-being. Play also enhances their language development, strengthens their physical abilities and teaches them how to interact with others. The benefits of play are far-reaching, supporting intellectual growth, social skills, resilience and emotional stability.

As stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children and young people have the right to rest, engage in leisure activities and participate in recreational activities of their choosing, such as sports, arts, or simply having fun. Research indicates that enjoyment is the primary motivator for children to stay active and outdoor play is particularly crucial for both their physical and emotional health. It helps reduce stress, improve mood and promote social connections, while also fostering a better understanding of the environment.

The data highlights that 56% of young people reported that they do not feel there are fun things to do in the Newry, Mourne and Down area, while 28% stated they do not have safe spaces to hang out with their friends. These statistics highlight a clear need for more recreational opportunities and safe, accessible spaces where young people can socialise and engage in activities. Addressing these gaps could play a key role in improving the overall well-being and happiness of the children and young people in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Young people have expressed a strong need for more support to create inclusive, accessible and safe opportunities for play and leisure. They highlight that having access to activities that promote physical and emotional health and well-being is vital for their development, especially for building friendships and social interaction. However, many young people, particularly in rural areas, face significant challenges due to a lack of facilities, including sports, arts and cultural activities.

The cost of participation in activities was also a barrier, some are too expensive for young people, especially during the current cost-of-living crisis, this can impact on the quality of their lives. Limited access to play and leisure activities can lead to young people missing opportunities to build skills, stay active and connect with others. Young people may also struggle to maintain their well-being, and for those young people who cannot afford to attend play or leisure activities they may feel more socially isolated and excluded.

Furthermore, some young people pointed out that sports, while prevalent, are often not inclusive enough for those not interested in athletic pursuits, highlighting the need for more non-sporting recreational activities.

Young people and stakeholders highlighted that they need inclusive safe spaces and access to play and leisure opportunities that are affordable and accessible. This would help ensure that all young people, no matter their background or location to participate and benefit equally which will in turn support their health, happiness and growth.

According to the Muddy Hands report, the importance of outdoor play for children's development is widely supported by educators, with 97% of teachers agreeing that outdoor play is critical for a child to reach their full potential. Furthermore, 88% of teachers believe that children are happier after playing outdoors and 86% agree that outdoor play helps children better understand the environment.

In Northern Ireland, opportunities for children to engage in play and recreational activities are plentiful. In the 2022/2023 year, there were 22,715 preschool placements and 36,556 children aged 0-3 were registered with Sure Start projects in 2023-2024, underlining the significance of play in early childhood.

The Newry Mourne and Down Council area also boasts over 170 council-registered playparks and 6 council-managed leisure and recreational centres, offering ample spaces for children and families to enjoy outdoor activities. These facilities are crucial in supporting the development of children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing, reinforcing the critical role outdoor play has in their overall growth.

Living in Safety and Stability

Key facts

In Newry, Mourne and Down 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in an area of deprivation.

33,143 children and young people (54.2%) live in a rural community in Newry, Mourne and Down.

According to the most recent census, 629 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQIA+.

24% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Newry, Mourne and Down come from a lone parent family.

There were 62 incidents with a sectarian motivation in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24.

There were 64 incidents with a racist motivation in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24. This is a 23% decrease from the previous year of 83 racial motivated incidents.

There has been a 10.8% (1,353) rise in incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24 to year 2022/23 (1,221) in Northern Ireland.

There was a total of 1,721 domestic abuse crimes in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24. This is a 17% decrease from the previous year. The average for domestic abuse crimes in Newry, Mourne and Down DEAs is 246 (NI average 250).

There was a total of 3,960 anti-social behaviour incidents in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2023/24. This is a 2% a decrease from the previous year. The average for anti-social behaviour incidents in Newry, Mourne and Down DEAs is 565 (NI average 567).

Suicide rates in Newry, Mourne and Down have decreased from 2017, 23 suicides to 19 in 2023. The suicide rate has dropped this past 3 years from 27 in 2021, to 17 in 2022 and to 19 in 2023.

In the last year, almost a fifth of 16-year-olds had experienced online violence (19%).

Psychological violence was experienced by 18% of respondents. Just over one in ten had experienced sexual violence (11%) and 7% had experienced physical violence.

Of those respondents experiencing violent acts or behaviour in the last year, the most common places where they occurred were online (42%), at school (35%) and a public outdoor space (26%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

Children and young people's well-being depends on the relationships they have with trusted adults, such as parents, guardians and role models. Stakeholders emphasised that when these relationships are positive, young people are more likely to thrive emotionally and physically. However, unstable, or abusive relationships can significantly harm their development and well-being, as noted by stakeholders, who highlighted the need for stable, supportive connections for young people.

For young people to reach their full potential they need safety, security and supportive relationships. Stakeholders stressed that quality learning opportunities in school, at home and in communities are essential. Importantly, they pointed out that young people have the right to live free from abuse, discrimination and prejudice. However, negative experiences such as neglect, abuse, bullying, racism and poverty can undermine the safety and stability of Children and young people making it harder for them to thrive.

In Newry, Mourne and Down, 18.1% of children and young people live in areas of deprivation, and 54.2% live in rural communities, where opportunities and support are limited. Stakeholders reported that these challenges are exacerbated by issues like sectarianism, discrimination and community tension. In 2023/24, 62 sectarian and 64 racist incidents were recorded, emphasising the need for continued work to create safe, inclusive spaces for all young people. Stakeholders highlighted that addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring young people feel supported in their communities.

Young people also raised concerns about safety, including bullying (both online and in person), intimidation and feeling unsafe within their communities, particularly at night. They reported being worried about drugs, alcohol and violence, with many feeling unsafe in certain areas. While domestic abuse crimes and anti-social behaviour have decreased, stakeholders noted that young people continue to feel concerned about their personal safety, particularly in areas where such behaviours persist. In fact, 26% of young people said they do not feel safe in their local area and 39% expressed concerns about crime in their local area.

Despite these challenges, many young people feel supported by trusted adults, such as family members, teachers and youth workers. Young people reported that they highly value safe spaces, where they can meet up without fear. However, concerns remain about safety on public transport, in poorly lit streets and within school environments, where young people often feel vulnerable. Young people need spaces where they feel protected from potential threats such as bullying and exposure to crime.

The safety of young women is a significant concern. Many young women expressed feeling unsafe and vulnerable, while young men also feel that they are unfairly blamed for societal issues related to male behaviour. There is a desire for more education, especially for young men, about respecting and protecting young women. Youth Services are seen as playing a key role in this education. 73% of girls reported that they are worried about the safety of women and girls, while 51% of boys shared the same concerns. These figures highlight the broader impact that safety concerns have across all groups.

Young people also expressed anxiety about the negative impact of the online world, particularly misinformation and cyberbullying. 34% of young people said that social media is having a negative impact on them. Stakeholders highlighted the need for inclusive spaces where everyone, regardless of background, can feel valued and safe. In Newry, Mourne and Down, 629 young people identify as

LGBTQIA+, highlighting the importance of creating supportive environments where young people of all identities can feel safe. Furthermore, 23% of young people mentioned feeling pressured to take part in activities that might be harmful to them, reflecting the need for safe, non-judgmental spaces to discuss these concerns.

While many young people across Newry, Mourne and Down feel supported by trusted adults and value safe spaces like youth clubs, there are significant concerns about personal safety, the impact of social media and pressures that might lead them to harmful activities. Issues like crime, bullying, and the safety of women and girls are at the forefront of young people's concerns. Creating inclusive, safe, and supportive spaces is crucial for their emotional and physical well-being, especially in communities facing sectarianism, discrimination and crime.

Good Relations and Equality

Key facts

33,143 children and young people (54.2%) live in a rural community in Newry, Mourne and Down.

1,537 Newcomers attend schools in Newry, Mourne and Down (4%) – NI Average 5%.

136 Irish Traveller children and young people.

9,006 (35%) of all pupils in Newry, Mourne and Down are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

6,853 pupils (19.8%) who attend school in Newry, Mourne and Down have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

In Newry, Mourne and Down 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in an area of deprivation.

According to the most recent census, 629 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQIA+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

An equal society treats everyone with respect and fairness, no matter their background. It helps remove barriers so people can reach their goals, and it values diversity, kindness, and understanding instead of hate or discrimination.

In Newry, Mourne and Down, where 54.2% of children and young people live in rural communities, access to opportunities and services can be particularly challenging. The rural nature of these communities often results in limited resources and support, making it even more vital to ensure that young people in these areas are given the knowledge and tools to understand their rights. Furthermore, 11,068 children and young people (18.1%) live in areas of deprivation facing additional barriers to education and other resources. Young people from these areas also expressed concerns about the lack of equality in their communities. According to the Regional Assessment of Need survey data, 44% of young people feel that they are not treated equally in their local areas, reflecting ongoing issues with inclusion and respect.

The area also has a diverse mix of backgrounds, including 629 young people aged 16-24 who identify as LGBTQIA+ and 1,537 newcomers attending schools (4% of the population). Young people in these groups have expressed feeling underrepresented and less supported in their local communities. Additionally, 136 Irish Traveller children and young people live in the area, some of whom report experiencing discrimination or marginalisation.

Young people in Newry, Mourne and Down have voiced concerns about unequal access to educational and recreational resources. Many participants highlighted that certain groups, such as young people who identify as LGBTQIA+, young people with additional needs and/ or disabilities and newcomer young people face barriers in accessing opportunities. They also mentioned that prejudice, including the use of slurs, is prevalent in some areas, influencing young people as they learn from the attitudes of their older people in communities. One young person stated, "I believe that LGBTQIA+ young people are not treated equally in my local area due to people being less accommodating for them and very little education about LGBTQIA+ available."

It is crucial to challenge discrimination and promote equality from an early age to support the most vulnerable in society, including disadvantaged, marginalised and minority ethnic groups. Many young people and stakeholders have stated there is a need for safe inclusive, supportive spaces and opportunities for diverse groups of young people to come together. With 6,853 pupils (19.8%) in Newry, Mourne and Down attending school with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND), inclusive practices are particularly important to ensure all young people can access the support they need.

Good Relations focuses on improving relationships between people from different political, religious and racial backgrounds, tackling sectarianism and racism and promoting cultural diversity and inclusion. Young people expressed that across the area many communities remain divided, highlighting that young people feel unsafe during certain times, such as in July, because of the division between groups. One young person shared, "I don't feel safe walking into town in GAA tops." This highlights the ongoing tension and lack of integration in some areas, particularly when it comes to shared spaces and community activities.

The regional assessment of needs survey findings highlights that while there is some positive feedback, challenges remain. For example, 83% of young people said that youth work programmes support young

people from different backgrounds and 77% felt that these programmes are accessible to everyone. Furthermore, 75% reported that they can spend time with people from different backgrounds. These figures highlight the potential of Youth Services to foster good relations. However, there are also clear concerns: 51% of young people think other young people do not respect those from different backgrounds and 44% believe young people are not treated equally in their areas. This demonstrates that, despite the positive impact of Youth Services, there are still significant gaps in equality and inclusion.

Across the area young people and stakeholders reported that interface and single-identity communities still exist, where people tend to live in segregated areas. These areas often have social housing communities that suffer from poverty, deprivation, economic instability and a lack of political leadership and community infrastructure. As young people mentioned, these issues can lead to intolerance and even crime or anti-social behaviour. One young person commented, "My youth clubs try to make it as even as possible for everyone to get opportunities, but there will always be people who miss out because they don’t apply or get included."

Young people have also expressed that they feel their voices are not always heard or taken seriously, especially in schools. Many feel they are treated differently to adults and not given an equal say. One young person stated, "Don't feel we are treated equally to adults in schools, don’t feel our voice is heard and listened to." This highlights the importance of making sure young people's voices are valued and integrated into decision-making processes, both in schools and in the wider community.

These areas of exclusion and discrimination can be addressed through specific actions. Young people have expressed the need for opportunities to bring people from different backgrounds together. "Have people from different backgrounds in groups so they can get to know each other" and "teach people not to discriminate and encourage talking".

Learning and Achieving

Key facts

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (incl. equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and Math in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 80% compared to the NI average of 76.1%.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23 is 3.9% (NI average 4.7%).

4.4% of young people aged 20-24 are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI Average 4.9%).

1,537 Newcomers attend schools in Newry, Mourne and Down (4%) – NI Average 5%.

136 Irish Traveller children and young people.

9,006 (35%) of all pupils in Newry, Mourne and Down are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24 – (NI average 28%).

6,853 pupils (19.8%) who attend school in Newry, Mourne and Down have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

451 children and young people were suspended from school in Newry, Mourne and Down.

The attendance rate for post-primary schools was 92.4%. (NI average 96%).

According to the most recent census, 629 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQIA+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Education is a basic right for all young people, as stated in Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is not just about going to school, education is about learning important life skills, understanding how the world works, and figuring out who you are and what you stand for.

Through education, young people gain knowledge, learn how to make good choices, and develop confidence in themselves. It helps them learn how to work with others, respect different views, and know the difference between right and wrong. In Newry, Mourne and Down, 80% of school leavers in 2022/23 achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (including equivalent qualifications), including GCSE English and Maths, which is above the Northern Ireland (NI) average of 76.1%. This suggests that, overall, many young people in the area are meeting educational expectations. However, challenges remain, particularly among marginalised and vulnerable groups. For example, 35% of all pupils in the area are eligible for Free School Meals, significantly higher than the NI average of 28%. This indicates that a large portion of students face financial hardship, which can affect their educational outcomes.

Education helps young people build routines, grow in confidence, and learn how to be part of society. It teaches important life skills like working with others, thinking for yourself, communicating, and understanding emotions. However not all young people have the same chance to succeed. Some young people face extra challenges like children and young people with additional needs, children in care, newcomers, young carers, and others from minority groups. In Newry, Mourne and Down, 1 in 5 pupils (6,853 young people) have a special educational need or disability. Many of these pupils find it harder to make friends or feel included in school. Without the right support, this can lead to them feeling left out or falling behind.

Young people in the area also highlighted that learning happens in many ways. They feel they learn best when they are listened to, heard and given the opportunity to express themselves creatively. This sentiment is echoed by the fact that 629 young people in Newry, Mourne and Down identify as LGBTQIA+, there are 1,537 Newcomer students attend schools in Newry, Mourne and Down (4%) and 136 Irish Traveller children and young people. This emphasises the need for inclusive education that respects all identities. Inclusion is key to how young people experience the world around them, many young people feel they do not always get the understanding or support they need and for some it can feel like no one truly sees or respects their reality.

Young people also reported that barriers such as peer pressure, mental health issues and financial challenges often make school feel like a place of inequality and discrimination, with some young people feeling out of their depth, especially in subjects like maths, which can heighten their fears about their future and careers.

In Newry, Mourne and Down, the attendance rate for post-primary schools is 92.4%, below the NI average of 96%. This reflects the struggles that some young people face in staying engaged with their education, particularly those experiencing personal challenges. Young people and stakeholders have stated that young people need spaces and opportunities where they feel included, where they can ask questions and be supported in a comfortable, non-judgmental environment.

They also need opportunities to develop important life skills, to help build practical, everyday skills essential for personal independence and success for their future life. These skills whilst not typically

taught in schools but are crucial for personal independence and success in life can be gained through engagement in youth provision.

Young people expressed a need for guidance and resources that will help them make a smooth and successful transition to becoming young adults. As this can be a challenging and often uncertain time. many young people may struggle to navigate this transition successfully, which can lead to disengagement, low self-esteem, or difficulties finding stability in their lives. The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or whose status is unknown in Newry, Mourne and Down is 3.9%, which is lower than the NI average of 4.7%, yet there remains a need to better support those at risk of falling through the cracks.

In summary, young people in Newry, Mourne and Down face significant barriers to success in education, including financial hardship, emotional health and wellbeing issues and a lack of support during transitions. Many young people expressed that they feel unsupported during major changes in their education and struggle with issues like peer pressure and discrimination. They require more inclusive and comprehensive support and emotional guidance. The most marginalised and vulnerable groups, require support to ensure they reach their full potential.

Respect for young people's rights

Key facts

According to the most recent census, 629 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQIA+.

Approximately 12,000 children and young people aged 0-25 years have a mental health need.

In Newry, Mourne and Down 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in an area of deprivation.

33,143 children and young people (54.2%) live in a rural community in Newry, Mourne and Down.

1,537 Newcomers attend schools in Newry, Mourne and Down (4%) – NI Average 5%.

136 Irish Traveller children and young people.

9,006 (35%) of all pupils in Newry, Mourne and Down are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24 – (NI average 28%).

6,853 pupils (19.8%) who attend school in Newry, Mourne and Down have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

All children and young people have rights that must be respected and protected. According to Article 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments must take all necessary actions to ensure these rights are followed. This includes economic, social and cultural rights. This means that every child and young person, regardless of their religion, race, sexual or gender identity, or disability, is entitled to rights that should be protected and upheld.

In areas like Newry, Mourne, and Down, where 54.2% of children and young people live in rural communities, it is especially important to ensure their rights are respected. Rural communities often face additional challenges in accessing services and support, so it is crucial that young people in these areas have the resources and knowledge to understand and protect their rights.

The survey found that 44% of young people across the Newry, Mourne and Down council area feel that their voices are not heard. This is a significant concern, especially for young people in rural areas where access to information and support may already be limited. It highlights the need for services that empower young people to speak up and ensure their rights are respected.

It is essential that children and young people are aware of their rights and are empowered with the knowledge and confidence to defend them. However, despite human rights applying to everyone, some groups of young people face more barriers in accessing and enjoying these rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which applies to those under 18, recognises that young people transitioning from childhood to adulthood are particularly vulnerable to discrimination. They often struggle to access education, employment, social protection and civil rights, which limits their potential and opportunities.

Children and young people who are more marginalised and vulnerable are less likely to have their rights respected. These young people are also at higher risk of physical and sexual violence, overrepresented in the justice system, subjected to discrimination and facing poorer educational, health and social outcomes. This is especially relevant for young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down, where 11,068 children and young people (18.1%) live in areas of deprivation, making it harder to access opportunities and support. Additionally, 33,143 young people live in rural communities where services are often less accessible. These figures demonstrate how geography and socio-economic factors can prevent young people from fully enjoying their rights.

The survey also showed that 69% of young people know their rights, but there is still a big gap in understanding and standing up for them. Many young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down have expressed a need for more education on their rights. For example, 629 young people aged 16-24 identify as LGBTQIA+, and many feel unsure of their legal rights or how to advocate for themselves. Similarly, 12,000 children and young people have a mental health need and struggle to access the support required to protect their rights. Additionally, 136 Irish Traveller children and young people may experience discrimination or marginalisation.

Feedback from young people aged 12-13 in Newry, Mourne, and Down revealed a lack of awareness about legal rights and self-advocacy.

Among young people aged 14-18, there is significant concern about the lack of respect for women's rights, with many feeling undervalued or disrespected. The data found that 74% of young people feel confident in fighting for their rights, which indicates that many feel empowered to stand up for

themselves when they understand their rights. However, they want to learn how to ensure their rights are recognised by adults in their homes, schools and communities. 9,006 pupils (35%) of students in Newry, Mourne, and Down are eligible for Free School Meals and 6,853 pupils (19.8%) have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). This highlights the diverse needs of the population, with many young people feeling unsupported in asserting their rights.

Young people, particularly those facing challenges related to their background, gender, disability, or other factors, often encounter barriers in accessing their rights. In Newry, Mourne and Down, with 1,537 newcomers and around 4% of young people potentially facing language or cultural barriers, it is essential to offer the support they need. By providing guidance and creating welcoming spaces young people can navigate challenges and thrive.

By recognising the challenges young people face and working together to address these barriers whether through improved access in rural areas, support for LGBTQIA+ youth, newcomer and young people with additional needs and/or disabilities, we can ensure that every young person's rights are upheld and respected, both locally and globally.

Making a positive contribution

Key facts

The attendance rate for post-primary schools was 92.4%. (NI average 96%).

1,537 Newcomers attend schools in Newry, Mourne and Down (4%) – NI Average 5%.

136 Irish Traveller children and young people.

451 children and young people were suspended from school in Newry, Mourne and Down.

In Newry, Mourne and Down 11,068 children and young people aged 0-25 years (18.1%) live in an area of deprivation.

33,143 children and young people (54.2%) live in a rural community in Newry, Mourne and Down.

According to the most recent census, 629 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQIA+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Young people thrive when they feel connected, heard, and included in every part of their lives. When children and young people get involved in things outside the classroom, they often develop a more positive outlook on life. These experiences help them grow in confidence, build independence, and learn how to bounce back from challenges.

But for young people to really thrive, they need to feel like they belong. This sense of belonging is important in Newry, Mourne and Down, where over half (54.2%) of children and young people (33,143) live in rural areas. In these communities, access to activities and opportunities can be harder to come by, making it even more important that young people feel included and supported.

When young people feel listened to, respected, and valued, they are more likely to get involved, however not everyone has the same chance. In Newry, Mourne and Down, 11,068 children and young people (18.1%) live in areas of deprivation, and 451 were suspended from school showing that some groups face real barriers to full participation. This is reflected in the regional assessment of need where 42% of young people said they do not feel listened to or taken seriously.

When young people feel their voices are heard, respected and valued, they are more likely to engage actively in school, at youth centres and in their wider communities. In Newry, Mourne and Down, where 11,068 children and young people (18.1%) live in areas of deprivation and 451 children and young people were suspended from school, it is clear that some groups may face barriers to full participation. This is reflected in regional assessment of needs survey results, where 42% of young people feel, they are not listened to or taken seriously. Despite this, 80% of young people believe they can make a positive change, which shows that many remain hopeful about their ability to influence the world around them.

The attendance rate for post-primary schools in Newry, Mourne and Down was 92.4%, lower than the Northern Ireland average of 96%. This suggests that there may be external factors limiting some young people's involvement in school life. Some groups, such as the 1,537 newcomers (4% of the school population) and 136 Irish Traveller children, face additional challenges in being included or engaging fully with their peers, especially in a community where the sense of belonging is vital for participation.

Children and young people need to feel that their contribution is listened to, valued and respected in all areas of their lives. Yet, the survey shows that 40% of young people feel they do not have the opportunity to make a difference in their school or community, indicating that many still struggle to be heard. Despite these challenges, 72% of young people say they have the chance to express their thoughts, which suggests that while opportunities for involvement are available, the actual impact of those opportunities can vary.

Inclusion is key to ensuring all young people can contribute to their communities, particularly for those from marginalized backgrounds. With 629 young people aged 16-24 identifying as LGBTQIA+ in Newry, Mourne and Down, as well as 6,853 pupils (19.8%) with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, creating spaces where young people feel empowered to speak out is vital. 51% of young people believe others do not respect those from different backgrounds, showing that efforts to create acceptance and understanding are necessary.

Even with the challenges they face, young people still believe they can make a difference. In the regional assessment of need survey, 80% of young people said they believe they can help create positive change through active citizenship, where they feel confident getting involved and speaking up about the things

that matter to them. Taking part in decision making supports young people's growth. It builds their confidence, helps them develop important life skills, and shows them how to face challenges head-on.

Unfortunately, not all young people have equal opportunities to participate. Where you live, how much money your family has, having a disability, or even things like your gender or background can make it harder to be included or get involved. In rural areas like those in Newry, Mourne and Down, these challenges are amplified, particularly for the 54.2% of young people who live in rural communities, where access to resources and activities can be limited. These obstacles prevent some young people from fully engaging in school and community life and the survey results reflect this, with 42% feeling that their voices are not taken seriously.

In conclusion, while many young people in Newry, Mourne and Down face barriers to participation there is still hope. The survey shows that young people believe they have the potential to make a difference, and many are already taking steps to do so. Young people and stakeholders stated that they require spaces where all young people can feel valued, respected and included where they can fully participate in their communities, develop as individuals and contribute positively to society.

Summary Conclusion of Needs across Strategic Themes

Children and young people living in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council Area face a range of challenges, from emotional health and wellbeing and physical health issues to social and economic difficulties, all of which affect their well-being and future opportunities. By exploring each theme, we can better understand the main concerns for young people and see where more support is needed to help them be the best that they can be.

Emotional Health & Well-being:

Young people in Newry, Mourne and Down highlighted that they face significant emotional health challenges, including anxiety, stress, bullying (both online and offline) and concerns about body image. These issues are impacted by limited access to mental health support, particularly in rural areas. There is a need for greater awareness of available support, with young people expressing a preference for more tailored approaches where they can connect to discuss emotional health and wellbeing issues in a comfortable non-judgemental setting. Providing support and creating safe spaces for young people to talk about their feelings is integral to improving the overall wellbeing of Children and young people.

Access to Play and Leisure:

Many young people, especially those living in rural areas, face barriers to accessing recreational activities and socialising with their peers. There is a clear need for more inclusive, affordable, and non-competitive play and leisure options. Young people have expressed a desire for a wider variety of non-sporting activities, to help reduce isolation and encourage social interaction. Providing these opportunities will improve physical health, enhance emotional well-being, and help young people build important social skills.

Learning and Achieving:

Young people in Newry, Mourne and Down face significant challenges that can impact their chances in life. Poverty and rural isolation make it harder for many to access the support, opportunities, and services they need to thrive. For groups like young carers, newcomer young people, and those with additional needs, these barriers are even greater. Many young people are missing opportunities and experiences that can help build confidence and independence. This is especially true for those who find it difficult to access services. Transitions periods like moving from school into work, training, or further education can feel overwhelming, confusing, and unsupported. Without the right guidance, these changes can be a time of uncertainty, where young people struggle to find clear paths forward. Many may feel lost or unsure about how to navigate these important life steps, which can lead to disengagement, low confidence, and missed opportunities, making it harder for them to take the next step toward their future.

Safety and Stability:

Young people in Newry, Mourne and Down are concerned about their safety and stability, particularly in relation to bullying, sectarianism, racism and community-based violence. Vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQIA+ youth and young women, are especially affected by feelings of insecurity. Young women often face additional challenges related to gender-based violence, harassment and discrimination, which can have a significant impact on their sense of safety and well-being. There is a pressing need for safe, inclusive spaces where young people can express themselves freely without fear of discrimination or

harm. To provide stability in Children and young people's lives by creating safe places for young people to socialise and form positive relationships will be crucial for emotional stability and overall well-being. Ensuring that these spaces are welcoming and respectful will help promote a safer and more supportive environment for all young people in the community.

Economic and Environmental Factors:

Young people in Newry, Mourne, and Down face significant challenges that impact their future opportunities, including financial struggles, limited access to education and services, and geographical isolation. Many feel uncertain about their future, with concerns about securing employment, navigating adult responsibilities, and addressing environmental issues like climate change. A large portion of young people face barriers to personal and professional growth, especially those living in areas of deprivation or rural locations. Despite these challenges, young people are eager to improve their lives and contribute to a sustainable future. They need support in areas like life skills, career guidance, and environmental education to help them overcome obstacles and build a confident, independent future.

Making a Positive Contribution to Society:

Many young people in Newry, Mourne and Down want to contribute positively to their communities but struggle to find opportunities. They want more chances to get involved in social causes and develop skills that will allow them to become active, responsible citizens. Young people need access to opportunities that will help them build confidence, leadership skills and a sense of belonging, while also benefiting local communities.

Respect for Rights:

Many young people in Newry, Mourne and Down feel that their rights are not always respected, particularly those from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds. Concerns include unequal treatment in schools, exclusion from social activities and a lack of respect for their identity. Young people have expressed the need for greater awareness of their rights, especially around gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. It is important to ensure that young people's rights are upheld in all areas of life. Educating young people about their rights and empowering them to advocate for themselves will help them feel valued and respected.

Good Relations and Equality

Across the Newry, Mourne and Down area there is a diverse population, and young people from different backgrounds often feel excluded or discriminated against. This includes young people from ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ youth and those with special educational needs. To foster a more inclusive society, there is a need to promote better understanding and respect between different groups. Young people from diverse groups need safe spaces and opportunities to come together to build mutual respect and cooperation, which will help create a community where all young people feel accepted and valued.

By addressing the needs of young people across these eight strategic themes, we can create an environment that supports the emotional, physical, social and economic well-being of young people across Newry, Mourne and Down.

The findings – Identification of priorities/DEA profiles

Crotlieve

Key facts

There are 9,912 children and young people aged 0-25 years old in Crotlieve DEA.

4,265 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

3% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or are unknown in 2022/23 is 3.4% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 85.5% (NI average 76.1%).

184 newcomer pupils in Crotlieve DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 5 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 66.7% increase from the previous year of 3 racial motivated incidents.

Crotlieve Stakeholder input/feedback

In Crotlieve DEA, there are 9,912 children and young people aged 0-25 years, with 4,265 falling within the key Youth Service priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. Among young people aged 20-24 years, 3% are not in employment and do not have a qualification, which is lower than the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%. The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or whose status is unknown in 2022/23 is 3.4%, compared to the NI average of 4.7%. Additionally, 85.5% of school leavers achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including GCSE English and Maths, in 2022/23, which is above the NI average of 76.1%.

Crotlieve is defined as a rural district electoral area, young people and stakeholders reported that living in a rural area brings significant challenges, noting access to essential services such as healthcare, education and emotional health and wellbeing support is often limited, with long travel distances creating additional barriers. Many young people in Crotlieve report feelings of isolation, as the lack of local activities and spaces to meet peers reduces opportunities for social engagement. Young people report that they have financial concerns with limited job opportunities which worries them about their future. Transport issues make it harder to access services and take part in community activities. Mental health problems, like anxiety and depression, are growing and the stigma around mental health stops some young people from asking for help.

Young people in Crotlieve have expressed feelings of being unsafe and have highlighted issues such as crime and fear of crime in the community, personal safety, violence against women and girls and the prevalence of drugs. They feel unwelcome even in school, experience racism and use of racist language and perceive favouritism towards males. There were 5 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24, a 66.7% increase from the previous year. Young people feel that they have a lack of opportunities and recognise that GAA activities are not suitable for everyone. They stated that they want access to safe, warm spaces where they can feel protected, hot food, somewhere to go at weekends, access to opportunities, for personal and social development.

Feedback from young people at a stakeholder engagement event and LAG stakeholders have identified the need for health and well-being support for young people, addressing both physical and emotional health challenges. This includes the creation of safe spaces, guidance on making healthy lifestyle choices and increased access to emotional health and wellbeing support.

Young people have highlighted the need for support with school-related pressures which can cause significant stress and anxiety, the need to address the negative impact of social media on emotional health, especially concerning sleep deprivation. Young people may struggle with the effects of excessive screen time, particularly on their sleep patterns and require education and support in managing their social media use in healthy ways.

There is a need for dedicated spaces where young people can unwind, feel safe and relax. These spaces can help combat the pressures they face in school and community, promote emotional well-being and offer a break from stressful environments. Creating environments where all young people feel respected and valued is essential for their overall wellbeing and emotional health.

Young people also require better access to support for their physical health, as well as education on substance misuse and its effects to increase awareness and prevention. Across the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area the higher-than-average rates of obesity among Primary 1 and Year 8 pupils, 21.3%

and 27.6% respectively highlight the urgent need for better access to fitness programmes and facilities. This is especially critical given that 25% of girls and 17% of boys in Primary 1, as well as 30% of girls and 26% of boys in Year 8, are identified as obese or overweight. Providing young people with increased opportunities to engage in physical activities and promoting education on addiction and its effects would not only help combat obesity but also raise awareness and prevent further health and social issues.

In rural areas, young people often face more challenges in accessing services due to limited public transportation, higher costs, or longer distances. Without accessible transport, these young people may have fewer opportunities than those living in urban areas. To ensure equal access for all, young people in rural areas require additional support as they may experience social isolation. Young people in rural communities require access to services where they can form friendships, build support networks, and experience a sense of belonging. It is especially important for combating isolation in areas where young people are physically distant from their peers.

Crotlieve Summary

- Feelings of isolation due to a lack of spaces for social engagement, reducing opportunities for peer interaction and community involvement.
- Increasing emotional health issues, including anxiety and depression with stigma around seeking help, which prevents young people from accessing support.
- Lack of safe spaces for young people to unwind, relax, and feel protected, which can promote emotional well-being and offer respite from stressful environments.
- Inadequate access to physical health support necessary to address rising obesity rates and overall health concerns.
- Poor emotional health and wellbeing outcomes exacerbated by social media, particularly regarding sleep deprivation and excessive screen time, with a need for education and support on managing social media use.
- Limited opportunities for personal growth and development, leading to uncertainty about prospects, and a need for support to prepare for adulthood and future life.
- Safety concerns related to crime, fear of crime, and incidents of violence, including violence against women and girls, with young people feeling unsafe.
- Experiences of racism and discriminatory behaviour, including racist language, highlighting the need for greater inclusivity.
- Insufficient community resources to support social development, particularly for young people who feel that traditional activities are not suitable for everyone.

Downpatrick

Key facts

There are 7,215 children and young people aged 0-25 years in Downpatrick DEA.

2,987 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

5.9% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 5.6% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 73.4% (NI average 76.1%).

The percentage of pupils with a SEN statement 1-3 in 2022 / 2023 is 26.3% compared to the NI average of 19%.

The percentage of pupils with a SEN statement 1-2 in 2022 / 2023 is 14.8% compared to the NI average of 12%.

124 newcomer pupils in Downpatrick DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 10 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 29% decrease from the previous year of 14 racial motivated incidents.

Downpatrick Stakeholder input/feedback

Young people in Downpatrick DEA face a range of challenges that deeply impact their well-being, educational outcomes and future opportunities. With a population of 7,215 children and young people aged 0-25 years in the area, a significant portion (2,987) falls within the key Youth Service priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. These challenges are compounded by key issues such as unemployment, educational achievement and incidents of discrimination.

Downpatrick is designated as a single Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA). Children and young people in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) face many challenges due to poverty and lack of resources. They often have lower school results, struggle with emotional health and wellbeing and have fewer chances for activities or safe places to spend their time. With high unemployment and financial hardship at home, their opportunities are limited. To help young people succeed, there is a need for better education, emotional health and wellbeing support, safe spaces to play and community support.

One of the most prevalent issues is poor emotional health and wellbeing. Many young people in Downpatrick report experiencing feelings of sadness, anger and at times depression. This issue is worsened by external pressures, including the strains of school exams, part-time jobs and the influence of social media. At the same time, young people often feel unheard by those in positions of authority, including doctors, who they feel may be too quick to prescribe medication without truly listening to their concerns. With 5.9% of young people aged 20-24 in Downpatrick neither in employment nor qualified, a higher percentage than the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%, these mental health struggles are compounded by the lack of suitable work or educational opportunities, leaving many feeling stuck. Emotional health and wellbeing support must be a priority.

Young people and stakeholders stated that the opportunity to participate in hobbies and activities often feels restricted. Those who are not interested in traditional sports find themselves with limited options for engagement, which is particularly problematic for those who cannot afford the often-high costs of various activities. The current cost of living crisis has made this even more pronounced, making it difficult for families to fund extracurriculars or leisure activities for their children. This creates a disparity in opportunities, particularly for the 73.4% of young people who achieved at least 5 GCSEs in 2022/23 yet may still lack access to the kinds of activities that could support their personal development outside of formal education. While sporting activities are a key interest for some, there is a real need for non-competitive options that allow young people to engage in physical activities for enjoyment rather than competition.

Young people and stakeholders highlighted the need to expand the availability of recreational options, such as outdoor activities or use of outdoor centres, particularly in rural areas where such spaces are often limited. Across the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area the higher-than-average rates of obesity among Primary 1 and Year 8 pupils highlight a pressing need for increased recreational options. With 21.3% of Primary 1 pupils and 27.6% of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight, there is a clear demand for more outdoor activities and access to outdoor centres. Expanding these opportunities would not only improve physical health by combating rising obesity rates but also foster positive social interactions, boost emotional wellbeing and provide young people with the confidence and skills to engage with others in healthy, supportive ways.

When discussing their future, young people feel a sense of bleakness due to the cost-of-living crisis, pay gaps, stigma around further education and difficulty securing apprenticeship placements. The

future remains a significant concern for many young people in the area, particularly as they face uncertainty about their career paths. The difficulty in finding suitable employment opportunities or securing apprenticeships has left many feeling disillusioned. The 5.6% of school leavers in Downpatrick who are unemployed or whose status is unknown points to a deeper issue in the transition from education to work. Young people report frustration over the pay gap for young people and the challenges of securing apprenticeships due to high insurance costs for employers.

Furthermore, the stigma surrounding further education and university placements, as well as the barriers created by the high costs of living, only add to these difficulties. These challenges also resonate within the broader context of 9% of young people in the Newry, Mourne and Down area living in deprived areas, which makes it even harder for them to overcome barriers related to employment and education.

The challenges in Downpatrick are further compounded by a higher-than-average percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), with 26.3% of pupils having a SEN statement 1-3 in 2022/23, compared to the NI average of 19% and 14.8% with a SEN statement 1-2, above the NI average of 12%. These young people require additional support to thrive in both educational and social settings, making it even more crucial to provide inclusive support and services.

Discrimination also continues to be a significant issue for many young people in Downpatrick. Reports of verbal abuse, particularly against the LGBTQIA+ community and prejudice against newcomer young people highlight the need for greater inclusivity and education. In 2023/24, 10 incidents with a racial motivation were recorded, marking a decrease from previous years but still highlighting the discrimination in the area. Young people have voiced their concerns about being treated unfairly in their communities, and while some feel that some services strive to be inclusive, they also acknowledge that there is more work to be done to tackle the underlying prejudices that exist. This issue is particularly important for the 124 newcomer pupils in Downpatrick DEA, who may feel even more isolated or marginalised due to their different cultural backgrounds.

Young people and stakeholders stated that there is need for young people from different backgrounds and cultures to come together to promote equality, diversity and respect. These opportunities would help individuals from different backgrounds connect with each other, dispelling myths and reducing stereotypes. Encouraging open conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues and providing safe spaces for young people to explore and express their identities is essential for creating an environment where everyone feels accepted and valued. In doing so, it becomes possible to break down the barriers of prejudice that persist in many communities.

The statistical data about school leavers and unemployment rates in Downpatrick also highlights the need for increased focus on education and training. The 5.6% of school leavers who are unemployed or whose status is unknown reflects the broader issue of how young people transition from school to work, particularly in areas with limited job opportunities. This makes the role of Youth Services even more crucial, as they can offer vital guidance and support to young people during this uncertain period.

Downpatrick Summary

- Limited emotional health and wellbeing support, particularly to address issues such as sadness, anger, and depression.

- Limited access to affordable recreational activities, which restrict opportunities for personal development and leisure.
- Insufficient educational support, contributing to low academic attainment, particularly among disadvantaged young people.
- Unclear pathways into employment, training, and skills development, hindering future opportunities for young people.
- Lack of safe, inclusive spaces where young people feel heard, supported, and able to express themselves freely.
- Experiences of discrimination, including racism and prejudice, particularly affecting minority ethnic and newcomer youth, highlighting the need for greater inclusivity.
- Poverty and financial hardship, limiting access to essentials, opportunities, and long-term aspirations for young people.
- Insufficient community support networks, with a lack of trusted relationships and adult guidance to help young people navigate challenges and transitions.
- Limited recreational options to address rising obesity rates and promote positive social interactions.
- Barriers to further education and apprenticeships, including stigma and financial challenges, which prevent young people from pursuing higher education or training.
- Ongoing peer pressure and substance misuse, with limited positive alternatives or protective influences for young people.

Newry

Key facts

There are 9,132 children and young people aged 0-25 years in Newry DEA.

3,637 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

6.5% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 4.2% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 71.4% (NI average 76.1%).

The number of pupils suspended in 2022 / 2023 was 128 compared to the NI average 65.

The percentage of pupils with a SEN statement in Newry is 8.2% compared to the NI average of 7%.

748 newcomer pupils in Newry DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 31 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 19.2% increase from the previous year of 26 racial motivated incidents.

Newry Stakeholder input/feedback

In Newry DEA, the needs of young people reflect both the pressures they face and the gaps in support available to them. With a population of 9,132 children and young people aged 0-25 years, a significant 3,637 of this group fall within the key Youth Service priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. However, many in these age groups experience barriers that impact their wellbeing and opportunities for the future for example 6.5% of young people aged 20-24 in Newry are neither in employment nor have qualifications, which is higher than the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%. Additionally, 4.2% of school leavers in 2022/23 were either unemployed or had an unknown status, slightly better than the NI average of 4.7%, yet still indicative of an underlying challenge in ensuring a smooth transition from school to work or further education.

Newry has two designated Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, children and young people living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas often face a range of challenges that can impact their overall development and opportunities. These areas experience higher levels of poverty, unemployment and limited access to resources. As a result, children may struggle with lower educational attainment due to underfunded schools and fewer extracurricular opportunities, which can hinder their personal and academic growth. Mental health issues are also more prevalent, as children may be exposed to higher levels of stress, including living in financially unstable households or environments with higher crime rates.

The data highlights that one of the most pressing needs identified by young people in Newry DEA, is the lack of essential life skills, with many indicating a gap in areas such as budgeting, cooking, personal care and conflict resolution. These skills, which are not taught in schools, are vital for personal independence, yet young people express uncertainty and anxiety about their future living situations. Some young people reported feeling confident about living alone, while others particularly young people with SEND mention the anxiety and panic attacks they experience, particularly when considering tasks like cooking and cleaning. This suggests that a lack of practical life skills is contributing to feelings of insecurity, especially as many of them are still dependent on their families.

Many young people reported that they face difficulties affording essentials such as food, school trips or medical costs. This is particularly relevant in where young people living in lower-income households are feeling the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and the absence of financial support from home is a major contributor to anxiety, sadness and stress. With 748 newcomer pupils in Newry DEA's primary and post-primary schools, poverty affects a diverse group of young people in the area, making it harder for them to engage fully in educational and extracurricular opportunities. These financial strains can lead to an increased sense of helplessness and have a long-term impact on their mental health.

Furthermore, the academic outcomes for young people in Newry are below the Northern Ireland average. The percentage of school leavers in 2022/23 who achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, is 71.4%, compared to the Northern Ireland average of 76.1%. This gap signals that many young people in the area face difficulties achieving the academic success needed to pursue further education or enter the workforce confidently. In addition to this, young people expressed a lack of adequate careers advice, particularly in areas like higher education and alternative pathways.

Educational engagement is also affected by exclusion. In 2022/2023, 128 pupils in Newry were suspended almost double the NI average of 65. These experiences can interrupt learning and make it harder for young people to reconnect with learning. Meanwhile, 8.2% of pupils in the area have a Special

Educational Needs (SEN) statement, compared with 7% across Northern Ireland. This highlights the need to create welcoming and inclusive environments, where all young people feel valued and able to take part, which help support their confidence, learning, and sense of belonging.

There is a strong sense that many young people are not prepared for the realities of their futures and are left to navigate complex decisions with little guidance, leading to uncertainty about their next steps.

A growing concern among young people, especially young women is the lack of safety in their communities. Many young women report feeling unsafe walking alone, even during the day. This fear affects their overall wellbeing and limits their ability to fully participate in everyday activities. Experiences of gender-based violence and a heightened awareness of misogyny and harassment have contributed to feelings of exclusion and vulnerability. These concerns reflect a clear and pressing need for safer environments where young women feel secure and supported.

Young people across the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area face significant health challenges, with higher-than-average rates of obesity among Primary 1 and Year 8 pupils. In 2022/23, 21.3% of Primary 1 pupils and 27.6% of Year 8 pupils were identified as obese or overweight, surpassing the Northern Ireland averages. This is a critical need because the high rates of obesity among young people can lead to long-term health problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and poor emotional health and wellbeing. Obesity in childhood can also impact self-esteem, social interactions, and academic performance. Promoting physical health can help combat social isolation and foster a sense of community among young people, contributing to their overall well-being.

The issue of peer pressure also plays a significant role in the lives of young people in Newry, with many feeling compelled to follow their friends into specific educational or career paths, whether these choices align with their personal interests or ambitions. This pressure, combined with external factors like family responsibilities and mental health challenges, further complicates their ability to focus on academic success or future career goals. With many young people having to balance the demands of school, part-time work and family life, finding time and motivation to focus on education is a major struggle. It is also evident that those who do not follow the traditional academic route face stigma and a lack of recognition of their achievements, leading to decreased self-esteem and confidence.

Mental health remains another key area of concern, with young people reporting issues such as anxiety, depression and the pressures of living up to societal expectations. The toll that social media, bullying and peer pressures have on their emotional health and wellbeing is significant and many struggle with how to manage these influences. While 6.5% of young people in the 20-24 age group are not in employment or education, it is possible that mental health challenges contribute to this disengagement, as many feel overwhelmed by external pressures and unable to pursue their aspirations effectively. Moreover, incidents of racism have risen by 19.2%, signalling that issues of discrimination and social exclusion continue to impact young people, further eroding their mental health and sense of belonging.

This is reflected in the emotional toll poverty and lack of support take on families, with many young people feeling sad, anxious and emotionally distressed due to the inability to afford basic needs. When finances are tight, these young people often face additional stress, particularly when they see their parents struggle with issues like heating costs, food insecurity and other essential expenses. As young people become more aware of the economic challenges around them, their sense of vulnerability and

frustration grows. This often leads to the feeling that they are being left behind or that opportunities are not available to them, increasing their risk of disengaging from education and employment altogether.

Despite these difficulties, many young people still express hope for their future, though they are uncertain about how to navigate their next steps. Some are aspiring to work in entertainment or pursue eco-friendly careers, while others feel more secure in their future than when they were in school. However, these aspirations are often tempered by the lack of confidence, financial constraints and feelings of insecurity they experience due to their circumstances. Their goals, while varied, demonstrate resilience, yet the barriers they face are significant and ongoing.

In conclusion, young people in Newry DEA face a complex array of challenges that affect their mental health, education and prospects. With 6.5% of young people aged 20-24 years not in employment or education and academic outcomes below the Northern Ireland average, there are significant barriers to achievement and personal growth. The lack of life skills, financial pressures and limited access to support services only exacerbate these challenges, highlighting a need for more comprehensive and accessible opportunities that equip young people with the tools they need to thrive. Addressing these issues will require support with emotional health and wellbeing, and practical skills to ensure that young people can overcome the barriers in their path and achieve their full potential.

Newry Summary

- Limited educational support leading to low academic attainment, particularly among young people who are more disadvantaged.
- Unclear pathways into employment, training, and skills development, hindering future opportunities.

- Poor emotional health and wellbeing, exacerbated by stress, bullying, and lack of support networks.
- There are elevated levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- School suspension rates are higher, suggesting there are challenges in fully supporting the social and emotional needs of young people.
- Experiences of racism, prejudice, and exclusion, especially among minority ethnic and newcomer youth.
- Exposure to domestic abuse, violence, and unsafe environments both at home and in the community.
- Poverty and financial hardship limiting access to essentials, opportunities, and long-term aspirations.
- Lack of safe, inclusive spaces where young people feel heard, supported, and connected.
- Ongoing peer pressure and substance misuse, with few positive alternatives or protective influences.
- Lack of trusted relationships and consistent adult support, hindering young people's ability to navigate challenges and transitions.

Rowallane

Key facts

There are 6,355 children and young people aged 0-25 years in Rowallane DEA.

2,562 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

3.2% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 3.3% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 80.5% (NI average 76.1%).

The number of pupils suspended in 2022 / 2023 was 90 compared to the NI average 65.

The percentage of pupils with a SEN statement 1-3 in 2022 / 2023 is 20.5% compared to the NI average of 19%.

82 newcomer pupils in Rowallane DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 5 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is an 80% decrease from the previous year of 25 racial motivated incidents.

Rowallane Stakeholder input/feedback

In Rowallane DEA, young people face several challenges that affect their emotional health, education and overall wellbeing. There are 6,355 children and young people aged 0-25 in the area, with 2,562 in the key Youth Service priority age groups of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. Among young people aged 20-24, 3.2% are not in employment or education, which is better than the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%. Additionally, 3.3% of school leavers in 2022/23 were unemployed or their status was unknown, a figure lower than the Northern Ireland average of 4.7%. Despite these positive statistics, many young people in Rowallane still face significant challenges, especially when it comes to emotional health and wellbeing, life skills and navigating their future paths.

Rowallane is defined as a rural district electoral area, children and young people in rural areas face challenges like limited access to healthcare, education and mental health support, often due to long travel distances. They may feel isolated with fewer chances to meet friends or join activities. Economic struggles and lack of job opportunities can affect their future, and limited transport makes it harder to get around. Mental health issues may worsen, and stigma can stop them from seeking help.

Emotional health and wellbeing is a growing concern for many young people in Rowallane, with anxiety, depression, and difficulties managing emotions being common challenges they face. The pressures of school, exams and peer relationships, alongside the impact of social media, create a difficult environment for many to manage their overall wellbeing. Many also report easy access to drugs and alcohol, contributing to the challenges they face. Although 80.5% of school leavers in Rowallane achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C in 2022/23, including English and Maths, academic pressures continue to add to the stress many young people experience.

In addition, Rowallane has a slightly higher percentage of pupils with a Special Educational Needs (SEN) statement, 20.5%, compared to the Northern Ireland average of 19%. This demonstrates the need for providing inclusive support services that are accessible to all young people and ensures everyone is given an opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Another issue is the lack of life skills education, which leaves young people struggling to manage everyday responsibilities. Young people highlighted that essential skills like budgeting, cooking, personal care and are not adequately taught in schools, leaving many feeling unprepared for adulthood. This gap in practical knowledge is particularly concerning for young people in rural areas, where feelings of isolation are compounded by limited access to social activities and support services. In rural communities, young people often lack opportunities to develop the skills they need, which adds to their sense of insecurity and dependency.

Safety is also a key concern, particularly for young women who do not always feel safe in their local communities. Reports of violence, bullying and harassment contribute to a lack of confidence and increased anxiety. Peer pressure, including the use of substances like vaping and alcohol, is also a significant problem and many young people feel they are unable to escape from these influences. These pressures, combined with ongoing emotional health and wellbeing challenges, create a toxic environment for many young people in Rowallane. Additionally, 90 pupils in Rowallane were suspended in 2022/23, significantly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 65. This may indicate the disruptive impact of these pressures, further hindering young people's educational progress.

Financial strain caused by the cost-of-living crisis adds another layer of pressure for young people. With families struggling to make ends meet, many young people cannot afford school trips, extracurricular activities or even necessities. This financial pressure contributes to feelings of exclusion and limits opportunities for personal growth. In rural areas, limited public transport further isolates young people, making it harder for them to access services, jobs or social events. The financial difficulties faced by families also impact young people's emotional health and wellbeing, as they often feel anxious or upset about their home situations.

Despite these challenges, young people in Rowallane are still hopeful for the future, although many are uncertain about how to reach their goals. Some aspire to careers in entertainment or environmental work, while others simply hope to secure steady employment. However, financial constraints, lack of confidence and insecurity about their future paths often hinder their ability to pursue these ambitions. Many young people express a sense of being left behind due to their circumstances, which can lead to disengagement from both education and employment.

Young people expressed that they also want more opportunities to meet young people from different communities to reduce feelings of isolation and build understanding. If young people have limited opportunities to interact with peers from different communities, it can lead to several unmet needs that negatively impact their social and emotional development. Feelings of isolation can deepen, as young people may lack a sense of belonging and struggle to form meaningful connections. This isolation can contribute to mental health challenges like anxiety, depression and low self-esteem, as young people may feel disconnected from others and excluded from wider social circles.

Additionally, without exposure to different perspectives and cultures, young people may develop less understanding of difference, reinforcing stereotypes and misunderstandings about other communities. Confidence-building opportunities are seen as valuable in helping young people cope with the pressures they face. Young people also highlighted the need for safe spaces where they can meet friends and relax without the pressure of academic or social expectations.

Issues like body image, anger management and peer pressure are also emerging concerns that need to be addressed. Many young people feel disconnected from their communities and there is a strong desire create opportunities for engagement with other cultures and build empathy.

Rowallane Summary

- Limited access to Emotional health and wellbeing support, with increasing anxiety and depression among young people, exacerbated by stigma and a lack of available services.
- Lack of opportunities to develop life skills, leaving young people unprepared for adulthood.
- Isolation due to rural location, with limited opportunities for social engagement, making it harder for young people to connect with peers.
- Increased academic and social pressures, leading to stress and difficulties managing relationships, schoolwork, and the negative impact of social media.
- Financial strain on families, which impacts young people's ability to access extracurricular activities, school trips, and necessities, contributing to feelings of exclusion and anxiety.
- A need for safe, inclusive spaces for all children and young people, ensuring everyone feels welcome, respected, and supported regardless of background or need.
- Opportunities for young people to connect with peers from different backgrounds, promoting understanding, respect, and shared experiences.

Slieve Croob

Key facts

There are 7,211 children and young people aged 0-25 years in Slieve Croob DEA.

3,097 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

3.7% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 2.6% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 75.5%. (NI average 76.1%).

The percentage of pupils with a SEN statement 1-3 in 2022 / 2023 is 19.6% compared to the NI average of 19%.

35 newcomer pupils in Slieve Croob DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 6 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 50% increase from the previous year of 4 racial motivated incidents.

Slieve Croob Stakeholder input/feedback

In Slieve Croob DEA, young people face a range of challenges that significantly impact their daily lives, particularly those living in rural areas where opportunities are limited. With 7,211 children and young people in the area, including 3,097 in the key age groups of 9-13 and 14-18 years, many feel that their potential is constrained by a lack of local services, resources and support. Some young people feel confident and capable of living independently, managing basic tasks like cooking, while others feel demotivated or uncertain about their future because of struggles with school grades. This is concerning, as 3.7% of young people aged 20-24 in the area are not in employment or without qualifications, which is better than the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%, yet still highlights a gap in opportunities for skill development and career preparation. Without additional support for preparation for the world of work many young people risk falling behind.

A significant barrier to success for young people in the area is poverty. Many families, particularly in rural areas, face financial hardships, which restrict their ability to provide young people with the same opportunities as their peers. Stakeholders have highlighted that this lack of access to resources makes it even harder for young people to build the skills or networks needed to succeed, limiting their future opportunities and chances.

Slieve Croob is a rural district electoral area, young people and stakeholders have highlighted the challenges that rurality has on their lives, including limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education and emotional health support, often due to long distances and lack of transport. Social isolation is common, with fewer opportunities to meet up with friends and other young people or to participate in a range of activities. Mental health issues, like anxiety and depression, are increasingly prevalent. There is also a need for more local facilities and safe spaces to support social engagement and a sense of belonging.

The scarcity of local sports teams and recreational spaces is an ongoing concern. Physical health is vital for young people, yet many must travel to other areas to take part in team sports, which adds to the difficulties of life in a rural area. The absence of activities locally prevents young people from developing their physical skills and connecting with others who share similar interests, further isolating them. Support with physical health across the Newry, Mourne and Down area is critical due to the rising rates of obesity among young people. With a significant proportion of primary and secondary school pupils identified as overweight or obese, there is a risk of long-term health issues, including heart disease, diabetes and mental health challenges.

When it comes to emotional health, some young people feel hesitant to speak openly about their worries, especially in school settings where they may fear being misunderstood or judged. This can make it harder for them to express how they are feeling and get the support they need. Without enough opportunities to talk things through in a safe and supportive space, it can become more difficult to manage everyday pressures, which may affect their overall wellbeing.

Young people highlighted safety as a concern. Many young people cited that they feel unsafe particularly when out walking at night and highlighted ongoing issues of fighting in schools and on buses. Young women have shared that they often feel vulnerable in public spaces. These concerns go beyond physical safety with emotional safety also affected, with bullying both in person and online continuing to have an impact. Without the right support and awareness to tackle these issues, young people’s confidence and wellbeing can be significantly affected.

Equality and inclusion remain critical areas for development within youth work. Many young people, particularly those from marginalised communities continue to experience unfair treatment and discrimination. This includes being blamed for incidents based solely on their background, which reflects a broader lack of respect for cultural diversity. To address this, it is essential to foster greater inclusivity and ensure that all young people especially those facing additional barriers, including those from Section 75 groups and those engaging through Irish medium are actively supported to participate fully in youth work. By creating respectful and inclusive environments, we can ensure that every young person feels valued and is able to benefit from positive developmental experiences.

Educational barriers also remain a challenge, particularly in terms of access to practical learning opportunities. Life skills training helps to foster independence and self-confidence, preparing young people for transitioning to adulthood and adult responsibilities. Without this support, young people may struggle to navigate everyday challenges as they grow older.

Young people also highlighted that long commutes to school, have made it harder for young people to stay engaged in their studies. Some must travel an hour or more, often taking two buses to get to school, which directly affect their ability to focus**,** physical well-being and takes a toll on their concentration and overall school performance. These challenges can result in educational setbacks that hinder their prospects. Inclusive practices are particularly important to ensure all young people can engage with the support available to them. In Slieve Croob, 19.6% of pupils have a Special Educational Needs (SEND) statement, slightly above the Northern Ireland average of 19%, highlighting the importance of making services accessible and responsive to the needs of all children and young people.

Finally, while many young people in the area are aware of some of their rights, there is still a lack of confidence when it comes to standing up for themselves. Some young women feel that they do not have the right to wear what they want, and many struggle with, standing up for their rights without fear of judgment. This lack of confidence in advocating for themselves can prevent young people from fully understanding and using their rights. Empowering young people with the knowledge and tools to stand up for themselves is crucial for their development and well-being.

The challenges faced by young people in the Slieve Croob DEA, especially those living in the most rural areas, are varied and linked. Addressing issues such as limited opportunities, lack of recreational activities, safety concerns and the need for more emotional support is essential to creating an environment where young people can thrive. By providing more access to resources and opportunities for skill development, young people in Slieve Croob DEA can overcome these challenges and reach their full potential.

Slieve Croob Summary

- Limited access to services and transport, reducing opportunities for connection, support, and participation in rural areas.

- Rising emotional health concerns, with stigma and fear of judgment making it harder for young people to seek help.
- Few safe, local spaces, limiting chances for recreation, peer connection, and emotional wellbeing.
- Feelings of exclusion and inequality, with some young people experiencing bias based on background or identity.
- Concerns about safety, including bullying, community violence, and young women feeling unsafe in public spaces.
- Lack of life skills preparation, leaving young people unprepared for everyday responsibilities and transitions.
- Low confidence in rights and self-expression, particularly among young women.
- Long school commutes, impacting learning, wellbeing, and daily routines.
- Need for inclusive, welcoming environments where all young people feel respected and heard.
- Desire for shared activities, to reduce isolation and build understanding across communities.

Slieve Gullion

Key facts

There are 11,451 children and young people aged 0 -25 years in Slieve Gullion DEA.

4,775 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

4.6% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 3.3% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 80% (NI average 76.1%).

222 newcomer pupils in Slieve Gullion DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There was 1 incident with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 66.7% decrease from the previous year of 3 racial motivated incidents.

Slieve Gullion Stakeholder input/feedback

Young people in the Slieve Gullion DEA have shared a variety of challenges impacting their physical and mental health. With 11,451 young people aged 0-25 in the area, including 4,775 in the key age groups of 9-13 and 14-18, they highlighted several physical health concerns. These include limited opportunities for young women to engage in activities outside of team sports, along with issues like substance use (drugs, alcohol, vaping) and body dysmorphia. Sleep deprivation was also mentioned as a significant concern affecting their overall health.

Being a rural District Electoral Area, this has challenges in relation to limited access to services, transport issues and social isolation, which can particularly impact young people and families living in these areas. Young people reported that mental health is a major issue and pointed to the effects of bullying, both online and in person, as well as feelings of isolation and loneliness, particularly in rural areas. Many expressed a lack of coping strategies and a lack of awareness about local support options.

Stakeholders in the Slieve Gullion area highlight the need for emotional health support tailored to young people. Slieve Gullion has continued to experience the effects of the past, especially from what has been passed down through our families and communities from the legacy of the troubles. The importance of providing safe spaces for young people to share experiences, have opportunities to connect with others and feel part of something positive is important to help young people move forward.

During focus groups, young men spoke openly about the challenges they face, like bullying, intimidation by older boys, and issues around racism and cultural differences. Some also shared concerns about the safety of girls and women, while recognising that boys can also be affected by violence. The young people highlighted that they feel safest when they are surrounded by people they trust like family, teachers, friends, football coaches, and youth workers.

Safety is a big concern for young women in the community, with many saying they feel unsafe. There is a need for education for young men regarding issues related to Ending violence against Women and Girls. Many young women voiced fears about walking alone or going out at night and called for stronger safety measures. Young people also cited that they feel they are treated unequally to adults in schools and believe their voices are not heard. Additionally, young women pointed out that boys are often treated more favourably in sports, particularly in football, emphasising the need for more equality and recognition of their contributions.

In focus group feedback, young people expressed concerns about their communities, including issues like arranged fights, violence against women and girls, negative representation of boys and a lack of safe spaces and services. Young people also cited concerns in relation to being exposed to crime in their everyday lives, as well as the increased prevalence of drugs within communities. Young people and stakeholders highlighted that there is a clear need for more safe, warm spaces for young people, as well as more opportunities for social and educational activities.

Road safety has been highlighted by stakeholders in the Slieve Gullion area, citing that young people rely on walking, cycling, or driving to get to school, work or social activities. This can lead to risk taking behaviour, particularly for young drivers who may not yet have developed strong road safety awareness or driving experience. Young people also face limited transport options, often relying on inexperienced drivers or unsafe travel methods. Peer pressure and the need to travel long distances to social events

or services can further increase risky behaviours. The long distances between homes, schools and community in rural areas can also mean that young people are more likely to be on the road for extended periods, increasing their exposure to potential accidents.

Mental health challenges remain prominent, with young people pointing to pressures related to social life, fitting in and making new friends, as well as the negative impact of social media on body image. Stress from school, peer pressure related to vaping, drugs, alcohol and the pressure to have a boyfriend or girlfriend were also highlighted. The political climate in Northern Ireland was also seen as having an impact on their emotional health and well-being. Young people and stakeholders stated that there is a need for comprehensive support to address these issues as if not addressed these issues can lead to increased anxiety, depression and other mental health problems that affect young people's overall well-being and future opportunities. The pressures related to fitting in, social media and substance use can hinder their ability to make healthy choices and form positive relationships, which are crucial for personal growth.

In terms of academic achievement, young people noted that 80% of school leavers in 2022/23 achieved at least five GCSEs, including English and Maths, which is above the Northern Ireland average of 76.1%. However, 4.6% of young people aged 20-24 in the area are not employed and do not have a qualification, which is slightly lower than the NI average of 4.9%. Additionally, 3.3% of school leavers were unemployed or had an unknown status in 2022/23, compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

Young people in Newry, Mourne and Down face a significant need for improved emotional health and wellbeing and physical health support. With 21.3% of Primary 1 pupils and 27.6% of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight, there is a clear need for more resources to combat rising obesity levels. Additionally, young people have expressed a need for better opportunities to build social connections and engage with their peers. A lack of such opportunities can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection, further affecting overall wellbeing and emotional health. Meeting these needs is essential to ensure young people feel supported, connected and empowered to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives.

Young people also reported that they need to develop self-discipline and learn how to say "no" to negative pressures. This will support young people to resist harmful influences, such as peer pressure related to substance use, unhealthy social behaviours or unrealistic beauty standards. By learning these skills, young people can build resilience, make healthier choices and foster positive relationships with themselves and others.

Slieve Gullion Summary

- Limited access to services increasing isolation in rural areas.
- Concerns around emotional wellbeing, with young people facing bullying, social pressures and limited awareness of support options.
- Need for safe, welcoming spaces, where young people can connect, feel supported and access activities that promote wellbeing.
- Ongoing physical health concerns, including limited inclusive activities, body image issues, substance use and sleep deprivation.
- Feelings of inequality and exclusion, with young people reporting unequal treatment based on gender, background or age.
- Safety concerns, especially for young women, with fears around walking alone, violence, and intimidation in schools and communities.
- Exposure to harmful influences, including peer pressure, substance use and unrealistic expectations from social media.
- Low confidence in self-expression and rights, with young people feeling unheard or unable to speak up, particularly in schools.
- Need for road safety awareness, with risks linked to inexperience, peer pressure and long rural commutes.
- Desire for support in building resilience, helping young people manage pressures and make healthy, confident choices.

The Mournes

Key facts

There are 9,865 children and young people aged 0-25 years in The Mournes DEA.

3,885 fall within between the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

4.1% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 4.8% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Maths in 2022/23 is 74% (NI average 76.1%).

The number of pupils suspended in 2022 / 2023 was 107 compared to the NI average 65.

The percentage of pupils with a SEN statement 1-3 in 2022 / 2023 is 20.4% compared to the NI average of 19%.

142 newcomer pupils in The Mournes DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 6 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 25% decrease from the previous year of 8 racial motivated incidents.

The Mournes Stakeholder input/feedback

In The Mournes, there are 9,865 children and young people aged 0-25 years, with 3,885 falling within the key Youth Service priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. Among the young people aged 20-24 years, 4.1% are neither in employment nor have a qualification, which is slightly lower than the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%. However, the percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or whose status is unknown in 2022/23 is 4.8%, slightly above the NI average of 4.7%. The achievement of at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including GCSE English and Maths, stands at 74% for school leavers, which is a bit below the NI average of 76.1%. With 142 newcomer pupils in the area's schools in 2023/24 and 6 reported incidents with a racist motivation, reflecting a 25% decrease from the previous year, the young people in The Mournes are facing a range of challenges in terms of rurality, educational attainment, employment, and integration.

Young people in the area also face considerable mental health challenges, with many sharing that it is not always easy to find the right support when they need it. They have expressed a desire for more accessible, youth-friendly emotional health and wellbeing support that is approachable and relevant to their experiences. Social media's impact on emotional health and wellbeing is another concern, as young people report feeling stressed and anxious about their self-image. A strong desire exists for improved emotional health support, which could contribute to a reduction in issues such as crime and anxiety. Bereavement is another factor contributing to struggles with emotional health and wellbeing and many young people rely on online resources and personal conversations to cope. The importance of creating safe spaces where young people can talk openly and feel supported is evident, especially in a rural area where access to services and peer groups is often limited. This is particularly crucial given that in 2022/2023, the number of pupils suspended in The Mournes was 107, significantly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 65, which may be due to a number of reasons including behavioural concerns, poor emotional health and wellbeing, rurality and farming responsibilities to name a few.

Young people and stakeholders emphasised the importance of safe spaces where they could talk openly and feel supported, offering a sense of security away from the pressures of school or limited community resources. For rural young people, safe spaces are crucial because they often face social isolation due to limited access to services, activities and peer groups. These spaces provide opportunities for young people to connect with others, share their experiences and receive emotional support in environments where they may not feel judged. In rural areas, young people may have fewer opportunities to engage in social activities, making these safe spaces essential for their emotional health and well-being.

Many young people expressed frustration over the lack of accessible spaces to meet with friends which they feel leads to heightened feelings of isolation, lack of community support and lower self-esteem. Isolation and boredom can exacerbate mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and stress. Without social outlets or healthy ways to cope with these emotions, young people may struggle to manage their emotional health and well-being. Boredom and lack of constructive activities could increase the likelihood of young people engaging in risky behaviours like substance use, unsafe social interactions or even criminal activity, as they seek alternative ways to fill their time.

Young people also highlighted the lack of opportunities for physical activities. The absence of physical activities in the area is a pressing concern, especially considering the rising rates of obesity and overweight among young pupils. Across Newry, Mourne and Down in 2022/23, 21.3% of Primary 1 pupils

were identified as obese or overweight, slightly above the Northern Ireland average of 20.4%, with girls being more affected (25% compared to the NI average of 24.3%). This trend continues among Year 8 pupils, where 27.6% were identified as obese or overweight, exceeding the NI average of 26%. Without structured opportunities for physical activity and healthy lifestyle promotion, these figures are likely to rise, leading to long-term health problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and poor overall fitness.

The presence of 142 newcomer pupils in The Mournes DEA in 2023/24 highlights the need for a stronger focus on fostering good relations and promoting inclusion. Despite a 25% decrease in racial incidents from the previous year, with 6 reported in 2023/24, there remains a clear need to address issues of sectarianism, exclusion and discrimination. Young people and stakeholders highlight the importance of safe spaces where cultural differences are celebrated, not judged, to break down barriers and reduce tension. By strengthening relationships within communities, young people can feel more valued and supported, creating a more inclusive, respectful environment for all.

Young people also highlighted a lack of opportunity in Education, particularly in rural areas. Many young people in The Mournes feel that rural areas suffer from a lack of opportunities and support, especially when it comes to building life skills. The young people also noted the barriers they face in asking their parents for financial support for educational activities or trips, which can be an additional pressure. They also highlighted the importance of inclusion in formal education, stressing that they learn best when they are listened to, heard and allowed to express themselves creatively.

Many young people are focused on their future and are taking steps, like opening savings accounts for university, to prepare. However, some worry that not achieving their desired grades may limit their potential. The unemployment rate for school leavers in The Mournes is 4.8%, slightly above the Northern Ireland average of 4.7%. Despite this, young people are hopeful for more job opportunities and appreciate support they receive to build their confidence and skills for future work.

Young people in the community have expressed a strong need for increased safety, as many feel unsafe walking alone due to bullying, peer pressure and concerns about drug misuse. They need support to address issues like discrimination, bullying and social isolation, which contribute to their sense of vulnerability. Additionally, there is a need for greater attention to mental health stigma and peer pressure, especially for those navigating friendships and social expectations. Young people are seeking environments where they can feel accepted and safe to be themselves, with a particular emphasis on the need for inclusivity and protection for marginalised groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community.

Additionally, young people highlighted the need to foster healthy relationships, build resilience against peer pressure, where young people have the skills to navigate social challenges and resist negative influences, they are better equipped to make positive decisions and form supportive, respectful relationships. Young people also cited the need to provide better support for marginalized groups, including the LGBTQIA+ community which is crucial for creating an inclusive environment where all young people feel valued, accepted and safe. Without these supports, young people may struggle with isolation, discrimination and emotional health challenges.

The concerns of young people in the Mournes also highlighted issues like bullying, vaping, boredom due to the lack of activities, and mental health stigma. Young people highlighted a strong desire for more opportunities to engage with peers, meet new people and experience more opportunities.

As active citizens, young people in The Mournes want more say in decisions that affect them, such as policies on voting and education. Despite their involvement in volunteering and school councils, many feel their voices are not heard in their schools and communities. They also expressed a desire for more education about their rights, including learning how their rights compare to those of young people around the world.

Environmental awareness also emerged as a concern. Young people want more emphasis on sustainability and better recycling practices in their communities. They believe that teaching positive environmental habits is essential for the future.

The Mournes Summary

- Limited access to local services contributing to isolation and reduced opportunities for rural young people.
- Rising emotional health and wellbeing concerns, with stigma and fear of judgment making it harder for young people to seek help.
- Need for inclusive, safe spaces, where young people can connect, feel accepted, and access support without fear of judgment.
- Concerns about physical health, with limited opportunities for activity, rising obesity rates, and a need for healthier lifestyle promotion.
- Feelings of exclusion and inequality, with some young people facing barriers due to cultural background, gender or sexual identity.
- Safety worries, including bullying, peer pressure, and concerns around walking alone or being exposed to drugs and antisocial behaviour particularly among young women.
- Barriers to education and life skills, especially in rural areas where young people face financial pressures and lack practical learning opportunities.
- Lack of opportunities to develop life skills, leaving young people unprepared for adulthood.
- Opportunities for young people to connect with peers from different backgrounds, promoting understanding, respect, and shared experiences.
- Limited social and recreational activities, leading to boredom and a desire for opportunities to connect with peers.
- Interest in learning about rights and having a voice, with young people wanting greater say in decisions and more education on civic participation.
- Environmental concerns, with a strong call for better sustainability practices.